"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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## The Church in the Changing Rural Community

By Charles E. Lively

This paper is concerned with the role of the church in the changing rural community. The title implies that the rural community will continue to change for an indefinite time. I believe that is a safe assumption. Therefore, I state the thesis of this paper as follows: Since the church is a major community institution, it must serve well and in its own peculiar way, the functions of a major institution. Some institutions serve in a narrow, yet essential manner, while others serve with much broader functions. The church belongs in the latter category.

In the stable agricultural community of the past the church served (1) to give the people a sense of unity and confidence in their relations with the Deity; (2) to stabilize and reinforce the mores and uphold the moral law; (3) to lend a sense of security in time of crisis; (4) to assist the wayward to confess and repent and be restored to good social standing; and (5) to administer to the poor and needy. Times have changed and the agricultural community is no longer as stable as it was, - but , with the exception of administering to the poor, - a function that has been largely assumed by government and by private agencies other than the church, these functions continue to be either peculiar to the church, or to be shared by the church and other community agencies. This is presumably as it should be. It is not that the needs of the people, and the functions of the church have wholly changed; rather it is that circumstances have changed, new forces must be dealt with by appropriate means, and the relative importance of some of the traditional functions has shifted. Let us look briefly at what is happening.

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This paper was presented before the 18th Annual Town and Country Conference for Laymen and Pastors, Kansas State College, January 21, 1958. Dr. Charles E. Lively is Head of the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri.

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First, let us consider what we mean by the "rural community". Half a century ago, the rural community was generally regarded as a small community dominated by farming interests, or perhaps fishing or lumbering. It was relatively isolated, to a considerable degree inter-married, poorly educated in a formal sense, and unsophisticated in the ways of the world. The people believed the Bible literally, and attempted to live by its teachings. Their social values were the traditional values inherited from their parents and grandparents.

This type of rural community may still be found somewhat intact in the more remote areas of the United States, but it seems to be rapidly disappearing. To be sure, there are plenty of small communities, but generally speaking, the small community may no longer be regarded as a "rural"community in the traditional sense. It is no longer highly isolated; the people are better educated; they are sophisticated concerning how people live elsewhere -- not only in America but to some extent in other countries; their interest is no longer uniformly centered in farming; their code of conduct has become more relative and less rigid; and in other ways they differ from the inhabitants of the rural community of 1900. Furthermore, these changes do not represent merely a shift from one group of constant characteristics to another. Rather we are faced with a process of continuous change over a period of indefinite length with the significant factors involved changing at different rates, and often in uncharted directions. Under such circumstances, community leaders are faced with the necessity of making a continuous reappraisal of the changing situation if they would exert the influence and leadership that every responsible leader hopes to achieve.

Broad National Forces Affecting the Rural Community:

We may well inquire concerning the forces chiefly responsible for these changes.

The basic mechanisms that have so transformed American society from what it was half a century ago to what it is today are to be found, first, in the growth of population and the mechanical revolution. Population growth settled the land and peopled the cities. The mechanical revolution transformed productive processes and increased production in urban industry and on the farm. Second, the development of indirect communication (i.E., the press, telephone, radio, cinema, and T.V.) banished isolation; and third, transportation (i.e., railroads, bus lines, automobiles, and airplanes) brought about a degree of mobility of the population hitherto unknown. The consequences of these factors in a land of abundant physical resources, and populated by a people dominated by the American dream of freedom and equal opportunity, have been so far-reaching that we have not yet been able to assess them fully.

One of the obvious consequences of the mechanical revolution and its application to the productive processes of industry has been to increase population mobility. People have been able to range

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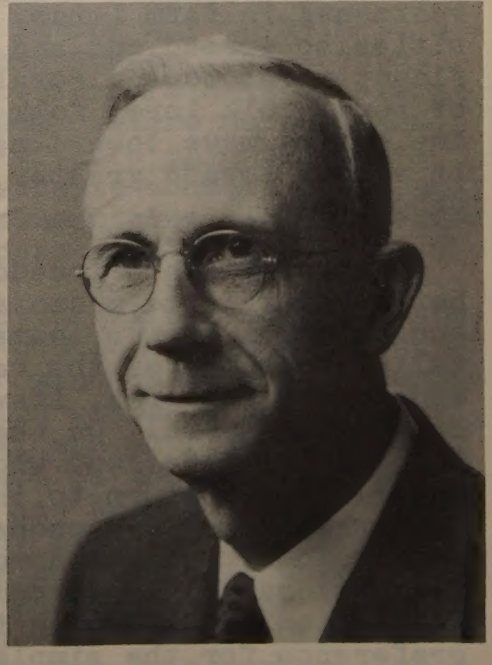
farther from the fixed domicile and return in short order. Ruralities have visited the cities and many have remained there. But after a time many have returned to rural areas bringing with them an urban point of view.

Another consequence has been that machines have been substituted for man power bringing higher levels of living. This process has gone on so steadily that our population has come to feel that it must go on indefinitely. The upward moving level of living has become the symbol of all our aspirations, our economic deity, in fact. We now seem to be arriving at the opinion that everyone must share in this high level of living whether he is willing or whether he is capable of maintaining it under his own power or not. The intense competitive striving engendered by this drive for an ever higher level of living far exceeds the necessities for human welfare. One may almost say that this much desired socio-economic value has become competitive with our traditional religious values. Fortunately, it seems not yet to have penetrated the rural areas to the extent it has the urbanized.

And yet there are those who argue that the machine will be the worker's undoing. It cannot be so if the educational preparation of the people keeps pace with improved technology. It is true that we do have a much higher level of schooling than formerly, but during recent years the quality has been questioned. We are still a nation of "doers" rather than "thinkers" and, as our signboard-T.V. type of information giving has developed, we have tended to accept its offerings as a substitute for fundamental education. Let us not forget that manual and social skills provide no substitute for the disciplined mind equipped with fundamental knowledge.



One of the most profound social changes, traceable directly to the mechanical and industrial revolution is the transformation of our more or less isolated population into something akin to what is termed "mass society". This mass society is held together chiefly by propaganda, channeled constantly to the people by indirect means of communication. In forming such a society, many of the traditional ways of grouping people, such as by race, religion, social class, and hereditary privilege, have been either destroyed or considerably weakened. The groupings in the new mass society are based increasingly upon interest factors, such as vocational, political and recreational interests. These are expressed through such social forms as trade associations, unions, and

political parties. As a consequence, the psychology of the crowd is more in evidence, and social movements tend to spring up quickly. This situation combined with rapid social change leads to a condition of uncertainty and tension which may be easily fanned into waves of crowd psychology and hysteria. For examples, witness the wave of McCarthyism, the sharp belligenent reaction over the civil rights issue, and the sudden confusion when Sputnik I began to trace its orbit. One of the most significant of these changes is that the process of developing a mass society is irresitably drawing the rural and urban population closer together and reducing the distinctions between them. Rural people are rapidly becoming familiar with city life. No longer do they warn rural youth against theevils of the city as the New England Boards of Agriculture did in the early days of the industrial revolution and advise them to remain in the country; although a few are exerting effort to draw industry into the community as a means of keeping their youth at home. Many urban youth graduates from our colleges of agriculture to become foresters, veterinarians, food technicians, salesmen and agricultural scientists. Others become dirt farmers. Rural-urban marriages grow more common, differences in schooling are becoming narrower, and rural people are becoming more tolerant of urban ways. The prestige of the city is constantly held before the rural population by means of mass news and propaganda which mostly originates at some urban editor's desk. This material gradually influences the attitudes and value orientations of rural people in favor of those held by urban people.

But if the rural population is being urbanized, so, also, is the urban population being rualized. The tremendous volume of migration, chiefly of rural youth, from rural to urban areas would of itself make some impression upon the urban scene. But that is not all. The vacationing of urbanities in the country, their investments in farm lands, the current attempt on the part of large cities to spread out and make more room for living represents significant moves toward ruralization. So, also, the revival in cities of rural folk lore, folk songs and dances, and even dialect. Indeed, the entire move toward metropolitian regionalism embodies within it a move toward greater ruralism as well as toward a new kind of urbanism.

With all this freedom of mobility and exchange of culture between rural and urban areas, a certain sorting of population and cultural traits seems to be occuring. Those types of personality that prefer the restless nature of city life, with its man-made structures, its noise and glamor, not only move there but remain there. On the other hand, those that prefer space, the quieter life, and who like to work with the soil, plants and animals, return to the rural community; and with them go many urban reared persons who have come to prefer rural life as well. Thus, this kind of sorting of population on the basis of occupational and environmental preference tends to keep the rural population from veering too strongly away from its traditional preference for the simpler, face-toface familistic type of social organization so characteristic of rural life generally. We seem to be developing a sophisticated, ambivalent, type of personality

that is equally at home in either the rural or urban environment.

Small Community Changes:

Perhaps the most outstanding fact concerning change in the rural areas has been the industrialization of agriculture. The application of mechanical devices to farming processes, the availability of rapid communication and transportation, has transformed the traditional farmer into a man who can take his place alongside the villager and city man. This fact of the farmer's greater competence and wider outlook has affected the villages both favorably and unfavorably. On the one hand, the farmer has purchased more of his goods in villages, and many new types of service, have sprung up there to serve him. However, the decline of farm population and number of farms during the last 20 years appears to be profoundly affecting the composition and welfare of many villages supported chiefly by agriculture. At the same time the business and social significance of the farmers who remain is being considerably enhanced.

The decrease in farm population due primarily to fewer young persons entering farming, and the flight of youth from the villages because of employment scarcity, has brought profound change in the composition of the rural population. First there exists a marked scarcity of young persons in the upper 'teens and in the twenties. This tends to slow the tempo of the rural community. Second, because of fewer youth in the community, and a longer expectancy of life for all, there is an increasing number and proportion of senior citizens. Although some of these elderly people are retiring on the farms, their chief disposition is to locate in the villages where the cost of living may be held to a minimum, and where social isolation is less pronounced. Recent events making Social Security available to farmers have accelerated the movement. Since farm widows seldom retire on the farm, and since women have a longer expectancy of life than men, an unusually large proportion of village residents consists of elderly women frequently living alone. In such communities some ministers may face congregations that are largely past middle age.

Because of the lengthening expectancy of life, and the accompanying infirmities of advanced age, the problems of health and welfare of older people have come into prominence in recent years. A disproportionately large number of senior citizens are located in the villages which, generally speaking, are poorly equipped to meet many of their important needs, such as medical service. From the beginning, our American society has been geared to the needs and values of a youthful population. We are still poorly prepared to meet the problems of an aging population. Unless we can adjust to meet these requirements so that our senior citizens can continue to serve some useful function, including their own comfort and happiness, we may well inquire for what purpose their lives are being preserved.

Finally, the rural community has experienced a genuinely spectacular rise in level of living, in formal education, and in general sophistication. While the median level of schooling of all adults in the rural population is not yet notably high, it is steadily mounting, and is tremendously supplemented by special education and experience in the armed forces, and by extra curricular education and experience accruing from press, radio, T.V., travel and other sources. With the increasing proportion of youth completing high school and college, the adultpopoulation under 50 will rapidly raise its formal educational level in the years immediately ahead. All this has great significance for the future competence of local community leadership and for the task of the professional worker, such as the minister. It suggests that the minister should understand the social composition of his community sufficiently to utilize its human resources. This point possesses significance for the seminary engaged in the education of ministers for the rural field.

Up to this point we have been attempting to designate certain of the more important factors involved in our rapidly changing society, and to suggest some of the impacts of these changes upon our rural communities. The presentation has beensketchy and impressionistic, but if it has refreshed memory and stirred the imagination, perhaps we may now inquire what the small communities can do as an alternative to drifting with the tide of events. Is the rural community helpless, drifting in a sea of changing relationships and values, or can it do something of value for itself. My answer is an affirmative "yes." It can do much to help itself, if it has the energy and courage to undertake it.

The rural community canscarcely afford to sit idle today among the currents of change that are determining the shape of things to come. If these communities would hold their own they must not only adjust to the times, but they must settle upon some goals of their own choice and make headway toward achieving them. It is only by doing so that the small community can retain its integrity and self-respect. It is for such reasons as these that many small communities are now organizing for self-improvement and the development of their latent resources.

Many rural communities resent what is happening to them by way of threatened decline. They have become community conscious and are carrying on "planned progress" programs, either on their own initiative, or as a part of a larger area program of small comunity development. In some areas, the state university, either with or without the cooperation of the federal government, is assisting in this effort. The land-grant colleges have a long and distinguished record for helping farm families to help themselves. The cities possess sufficient resources to develop their own programs if they are so inclined, but the rural villages have generally lacked the necessary initiative and leadership.

The Church Situation:

Beyond cooperation for the planned community program of improvement

lies the realm of the community institution and the organized social group. Because of the heterogeneity of the community the lack of a compelling community problem, and a leadership of sufficient following, it is often impossible to enlist all of the people in a total effort to attack a local problem. However, local institutions and organized groups seem to have less difficulty. The church is one of these.

In considering some things that the rural church can undertake, it is well to keep in mind the great difficulty of making generalizations that will fit all rural churches. With the numerous religious bodies represented in rural America, one must be cautious about making generalizations that cross denominational lines. The generalizations made here are based upon considerable knowledge concerning what is happening in midwest rural communities and upon research into the situation of the rural church in Missouri during the past five years.

Sometimes it is easier to indicate some of the things that should not be done. In this situation that appears to be the case. First, the rural church should not cling to the notion that good soil invariably produces good churches. In other words, the rural church cannot honestly claim that the soil type is a valid reason for either its success of failure. A careful study of this problem using a reasonably reliable sample of rural Missouri yielded a correlation between the level of religious group action and soil type, classified by its productivity of 0.39. This means that soil productivity accounted for about 15 percent of church activity. This relationship does not mean that unsuccessful churches are not found upon poor land. It means that simply by knowing the productivity of a given soil type one cannot predict with reasonable success, the proportion of successful rural churches that will be found.

Another exercise of doubtful value is that of attributing the success or failure of rural churches to the proportion of tenants in the farm population. Here the correlation between the index of religious group action and the percent of farm tenancy in the population proved to have no predictive value. Although it may be that in a high tenancy area, the church may tend to reflect the characteristics of the tenant population more than the characteristics of owners, such difference apparently has little effect upon the level of religious group action.

Still another fallacy is seen in the assumption that rural churches serving areas with a high level of family living are more likely to be successful than churches serving areas with a low level showed a relationship that was only barely significant, and one that possesses no predictive.

And now for a few positive suggestions. One consideration that should be kept in mind is that the location of rural churches is important from the standpoint of survival. Although church plants already located cannot readily be moved, careful consideration should be given to the location of new church structures. In this matter population patterns are important. The early rural church followed population patterns and it is still wise to do so. Future population movements tend to be anticipated. There is a tendency for a higher proportion of rural churches to be located in the villages, and open country churches located too close to a thriving village or small city are likely to be less successful. Also, it is noted that two churches of the same denomination may be located too close together for satisfactory growth. No doubt there are other factors in location that can affect church success and should be considered.

The church is a complex institution, and in its full bloom it serves many purposes. In its simplest form it consists of a group of people with similar religious beliefs who regularly worship together. But in its full bloom it carries on a diversified program, both religious and social, by means of a variety of specially organized sub-groups. The rural church characteristically maintains from one to seven sub-organizations and , in addition to the usual worship services, carries on varying degrees of educational, recreational and social service activities. These activities must be regarded to the particular needs of the community served, which means that the church leadership must understand the community sufficiently to perceive the needs and meet them in an appropriate manner. There is a great variation in the degree to which rural churches seem to be responding to local community needs. The average score of Missouri rural churches, based upon three types of activity (namely, educational, recreational and social service) was 47.3; but 19.2 percent scored less than 20 and 13 percent scored 80 or above. In general, small rural churches scored lowest (30.6) and large rural churches scored highest (65.3). Obviously, an increase in the size of the religious group enables the rural church to present a more diversified program of services and presumably to serve the needs of the community more effectively.

It is my conviction, however, that we are now living in a period when what is needed most is more than the conventional list of church services. Never have we lived in a period, it seems to me, when the well-known maxim, "Where there is no vision the people perish", held greater truth than it does today. We are engulfed in a swirl of events, the causes and consequences of which we only dimly understand. We need more intelligent leadership, both locally and nationally. We need the help of every individual, group and institution that has anything to contribute. The church can contribute much if it will.

The Christian church has always served in time of crisis and unsettled conditions. During the Dark Ages in Europe, it helped to reduce social disorganization and provided a haven for many who gave continuity of culture for later generations. During pioneer America, it followed the frontier, gave moral courage and assistance to the pioneers in meeting the crises that faced these courageous people.

Today, the crises facing the American people are not the dangers of flood and famine; they are cultural and intellectual in nature. The task is to see the rapid social changes that are occuring all about us, and to understand their meaning and probably consequences in terms of human relations, social values and personality. We are moving at an accelerated rate into an era that could see the destruction of mankind and culture as we know it. On the other hand, it could result in hitherto unbelievable achievement and character. The crying need is for better understanding and leadership to save mankind from becoming lost in a melieu of social and cultural change that we neither understand nor know how to control. In the rural community, the minister is in a strategic position both to educate and to lead the people. It is regrettable that our rural ministers on the average, are less well educated than our urban ministers. It should not be so, for they are needed to counsel and instruct, pointing the way that the people musttravel in order to reach goals of achievement and ultimate peace. This weakness in the preparation of the rural ministry would seem to be largely a result of our hierarchy of striving. Rural leadership has striven less in the competitive scramble for recognition. Educational preparation for rural life, symbolized by the one-room school and the country church, have failed to keep pace. In such cases, a relative loss would appear to be about as serious as an absolute loss.

To perform its task, the ministry must understand the rural community, its changes and its needs; and the church program must be adapted to meet those needs. At various times it has been debated whether the Christian church should limit its program to preaching the gospel or whether it should also try to help solve social problems. My answer is that it should do both. The rural minister has a contribution and he should feel free to make it. In my opinion, that contribution, in addition to the traditional religious aspects of the church program, should consist of an educational program of counseling with the people and developing local leadership having better understanding of community needs and trends, so that they may effectively lead the people in a program of continuous adjustment and improvement.

It can be readily seen that this sort of program is more than a one-man job. What is needed is more two-minister churches, -- the one to administer the religious program, and the other to conduct the educational program. If we could have more such

churches, with each minister well trained for his special task, I should be less concerned about the effectiveness of the rural church. However, under present circumstances, such a goal would seem to be impractical. An alternative which might bring good results in many cases is that of making better use of local lay leadership. Shorter terms of office with the consequent greater turnover of local leaders, and more time spent by the minister in training such leaders, might bring gratifying rewards. It might strengthen the influence of the church with the children and youth of the community. With the family turning over more of its child training functions to other community institutions, I think I should prefer to see a larger share delegated to the church. It might produce a better system of social control.

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# Rapid Social Change in the Orient

The World Council of Churches has been conducting a study in considerable depth with reference to Christian responsibility in areas of rapid social change. We are glad to share with readers of the Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, a pertinent statement from Mr. M. N. Thomas, on the subject of leadership. Rural pastors will find his statement of interest because in some repects it parallels situations in the United States.

Leadership

Conditions at present in the village are not very conducive to the development of constructive leadership. Age, wealth, and hereditary factors play a very important role in the determination of leadership. Such a leadership is not in keeping with the ideals of democracy. However, there seems to be a new awakening and at many places the old traditional leadership is being challenged. In some places, the young educated people have been able to assert themselves. This would indicate an awakening in the villages. There is need to channelise this new awakening. New criteria must be found in the emergence of leaders. These should be social achievements, usefulness to the community, education and character. The present is a period of transition and we hope that these new values would become established.

There should be greater participation of women in village affairs. We would even suggest that by law there should be women representation in the panchayats. There is little youth leadership in the villages. The potential leadership in the youth needs to be discovered through youth organizations. A broader outlook should be given to the young people through youth camps and their energies should be vitalised and channelled towards the achieving of social goals.

Methods to achieve the above

1) Greater freedom of expression and opportunity for leadership for all, especially youth and women.
2) Through a process of formal and informal education.
3) By widening the outlook through village reading rooms and study groups, youth camps, educational tours, through mass communications (such as mobile exhibits, mobile libraries, etc.)
4) By encouraging writers to study the social changes taking place in the villages and to write so as to enable the villages to appreciate new ideals. There is need to develop rural journalism. Newspapers and magazines which are appealing to the villagers should be started.
5) By studying folk culture and influencing them so as to relate them to the new social goals. Folk culture penetrates deep into the rural society. If the new social values are to be established in the rural society, they need to become a part of the folk culture.
6) There is at present a migration to cities with the result that the educated of the village go away. Some flow-back is necessary in order to provide for the vacuum created. Inducements should

be given for retiring people to go back to the village and settle down. This can be accomplished either by an honorary appointment or the providing of loans for buying lands, building houses, etc.

7) By providing greater physical amenities in the villages such as water, light, health services, etc.

8) Village schools should be used for promoting social goals by making them community centres of activity.

9) If there are no schools, community centres should be established.

10) The radio should be utilized to spread the ideals of the new society. More and more rural people should be used in the radio programmes.

11) The Government publicity at present is mostly of an informative nature. It should be more purposive and educative of the social goals.

12) Family camps should be arranged.